

plcmc472

When you cannot find the right school, here is the solution

## TURNING HOME INTO SCHOOL

BY LADY PAKENHAM

'And what school do you go to?' said a kindly grown-up to my youngest son, aged five. 'Oh, I go to *Mummy's school*,' came the prompt reply. There was an unmistakable note of self-satisfaction in his voice.

Of course, the answer was not quite accurate. He and I together could not make up a 'School' in the sense his brothers and sisters used the word. Our schoolroom was really a playroom. His lessons were really 'occupations'. But we had spent two whole terms together. And all this had been worked out under guidance—the wise and experienced guidance of the Parents' National Educational Union.

I wonder how many other mothers have debated, as I did, this particular problem? How to fill an awkward educational gap? The gap may be caused by different things. Perhaps you live far away from a school. You feel you would like to wait a bit before you send your child on that bus journey. Perhaps yours is an only child, and you want to give him a taste of organised occupations before he starts school proper. Possibly, as in my case, he has reached school age. But you can't get him into the particular school you want for a term or two.

Whatever the reason for the gap, there's an obvious place in which to fill it—Home. And an obvious person—Mother.

Before I go on to show how Mother and Home can turn into a Parents' Union School, I want to make one point. It is very important that a child's first impression of school should be a happy one. Many children do, indeed, look forward to school eagerly. They feel it will promote them to the grandeur of their older brothers and sisters. Some under-fives describe their school experiences to strangers before they have ever been there!

But others will shrink from the idea of school. They will need some tactful introduction to it. What could be happier than two hours every morning with Mother herself? To most children the thought of having their mother to themselves, devoting herself to them for two whole hours at a stretch, is very Paradise. My son, in fact, liked it far too much. He often badgered me to make it longer: 'Can't I have school in the afternoon, too, Mummy?' When I caught 'flu in the middle of the winter term, my ruthless pupil tried to make me conduct his lessons from bed. An older sister, temporarily absent from school, was only too delighted to join in. Having two children greatly increased the fun of many of our activities, particularly

singing games, poetry and handwork. The only disaster was in painting, where the temptation to paint each other instead of the paper proved irresistible.

But these two terms at home did not spoil Kevin for the 'real' school when a vacancy appeared. His mornings away from home were described as 'wizard' and 'smashing'. But when, the other day, he was kept indoors with a cold, there was no doubt in his mind as to how he should pass his time. He made a bee-line for his old P.N.E.U. books. Out came the number books, reading, writing and handwork. What a boon when a six-year-old gives himself lessons! And for the sheer joy of it... It's a tribute, too, to the methods of this educational union.

I turn now to the 'guiding hand' of the P.N.E.U. I was lucky enough to live near the London offices of the Parents' National Educational Union, at 171 Victoria Street, S.W.1. So, having taken the decision to appoint myself Kevin's parent-teacher for the coming term, I went in search of advice and equipment.

### FINDING OUT THE DO'S AND DON'TS

How much I enjoyed that first visit. I went in full of good, but undefined intentions; pious, but woolly, hopes; and a mass of half-formulated queries. How long is a 'morning's work' for a child of five? Three hours or less? How long should one spend on any one subject at a time? Should one test children's knowledge? Is it a good thing to ask them questions about the books we read to them?

I came out full of information, vital hints, and crayons galore—huge fat ones, all the colours of the rainbow. Also the thickest, blackest pencil I had ever seen, a pile of coloured sheets of paper with gummed backs, lots of tracing paper, reading cards, exercise books and tins of powder paint.

But I think the two most useful things of all were a shilling book by Miss E. Kitching on *Children at Home and in the Parents' Union School*, and a pamphlet giving specimen timetables for preparatory classes.

Here is some of the useful advice I got.

1. Two to two-and-a-half hours a day is enough for the five-year-old. Don't forget 'Break' outdoors.

2. Never spend more than ten minutes at a time on a subject that needs concentration, e.g. reading, writing and numbers. You can carry on for fifteen or twenty minutes with the others. But encourage small 'Breaks' between all



Lady Pakenham at home with her eight children. From left to right in the picture are: Patrick at the bookshelf; Thomas, the eldest son and heir to the baronetcy seated on the floor; Antonia, the eldest daughter, who has recently started work with a publisher; Catherine; Rachel; Lady Pakenham with Kevin, the youngest, on her lap; Michael and Judith.

lessons by letting your child get out and put away everything himself.

3. Preparatory work must be informal and flexible—but not irregular. Don't confuse flexibility with a haphazard timetable. Frequent half-holidays, when two hours' teaching happen to be a little inconvenient for you, are to be avoided. The child should have a feeling of the utmost freedom. But the parent-teacher must consider herself as bound as if she were doing a paid job. Otherwise the whole thing will lack seriousness, and collapse.

It was a great help to know that all one's efforts were made within a real educational framework. At the end of ten weeks one could send in a report. This would come back with further advice and criticism.

We parents were urged to keep a log book. In it we entered each morning's work, with the time spent on every subject. It's amazing what a kindly mentor that log book becomes. Somehow one can't let it down.

4. The vexed question of handwriting is made beautifully easy. I use the word beautifully advisedly, for the Marian Richardson writing cards are lovely to look at and inspire splendid original patterns.

All the sentences and rhymes are copied through tracing paper. Kevin found writing hard, and numbers easy. But his aberrations were as fascinating as his successes. He had an uncontrollable urge to write backwards from right to left. We got great amusement from holding it up and reading it the right way in the mirror.

Enormous pictures were achieved economically through an excellent tip given by the P.N.E.U. secretary. Don't

buy fresh sheets of paper. If you do, the expense will automatically make you say to your child: 'Don't waste it!' This is all wrong. Sheet after sheet—3 ft. by 2 ft.—must be available. What so handy and inexpensive as old newspapers? Make a good thick pile of them. The wonderful thing is small children don't mind the print.

5. On the point about questioning five-year-olds, the P.N.E.U. was quite definite. 'Kevin should not be expected to narrate what is read to him, nor should he be questioned on it. If he volunteers to tell back, all well and good. But he should not be pushed at this stage.'

Poetry and singing play a big part in the P.N.E.U. curriculum. I doubt whether I should have dared to attempt the latter but for their encouragement. Born into a sadly unmusical family, it took Kevin a long time before he could imitate one note correctly. But how enchanted he was when the right sound came out at last. It reminded me of an older sister who had suddenly begun to sing in tune at four and a half, and was asked how she managed to do it. 'I just made a voice in my tummy,' she replied, 'and then put it into my mouth.'

Impossible to enumerate the many other subjects we covered—foremost in popularity being scripture and nature. Enough to say that we tried to look at man in his three relationships—with himself (history, etc.), with the outside world (nature, geography, etc.), and with his Maker (scripture), always remembering that 'education' for a five-year-old means occupations in a playroom, not lessons in a classroom. And that for all ages 'education is an atmosphere, a discipline, a life.'





Carlton

Make a farmhouse tea

# PLUM HEAVIES FOR TEA AND OTHER COUNTRY CONFECTIONS

BY HELEN JEROME

Away go all resolutions about slimming when there are hot cakes for tea, home-made and luscious, and the table is drawn up to a bright fire and there is leisure to eat happily. Many counties are famous for their cake specialities, and these recipes merely touch the fringe of what may be a most interesting search in old and yellowed 'receipt' books. In the recipe for potato scones, a girdle can be used. For those who have never cooked with a girdle this should be heated just before the dough is mixed and should be rubbed, immediately before use, with a piece of suet or lard wrapped in a small piece of paper. A girdle (English or Scottish) and a griddle (Irish) are the same thing. The Welsh bakestone is similar but is thicker and has a loop handle at one side instead of a handle reaching over the top.

## PLUM HEAVIES

(Sussex)

These local hot cakes are 'heavy' in name only, being deliciously rich scones. They are very quick to make—a good emergency dish—and should be served hot from the oven, with butter.

½ lb. self-raising flour, or ½ lb. plain flour and 1 heaped teaspoonful baking powder	2-3 oz. currants and sliced raisins (together)
Pinch of salt	1 egg
2 oz. margarine	4-5 tablespoonsful milk
1 tablespoonful castor sugar	Milk to brush over, and a little sugar to dredge.

Sieve flour, salt, and baking powder, if used. Rub in margarine, and add sugar and fruit. Add milk to whisked egg, and mix all to a soft pliable dough.

Roll out to a square, ½ inch thick, and cut into squares of 2-2½ inches. Put them on to a greased baking tin, brush with milk, and sprinkle lightly with sugar.

at home with these English countryside recipes

Bake in a hot oven, Mark 8 or 475 degrees F., on a shelf placed near the top of the oven. They will take about 8-10 minutes to bake, and should be nicely browned.

## PARKIN

(Yorkshire and Lancashire)

½ lb. plain flour	½ lb. medium or fine oatmeal
1 teaspoonful baking powder, or ½ teaspoonful bicarbonate of soda	½ lb. treacle
2 teaspoonsful ground ginger	½ lb. dripping or lard
1 teaspoonful ground carraways (optional)	½ lb. brown sugar
	4-5 tablespoonsful milk
	1 egg

Sieve together flour, baking powder or bicarbonate, and spices. Add oatmeal. Warm treacle, fat, and sugar, until smooth. Beat egg and add the milk.

Add treacle mixture to dry ingredients, then add egg and milk. Mix all well.

Put mixture into a Yorkshire pudding tin about 10 inches by 8 inches, lined with greased paper. Bake for approximately one hour in a cool oven, preheated to Mark 3-4, or 300-325 degrees F.

When the cake is cold, store in a tin for a day or two, then cut into squares or strips for serving.

## POTATO SCONES

(Lancashire and the North)

6 oz. self-raising flour, or plain flour with 1 heaped teaspoonful baking powder	3 oz. freshly cooked, mashed potato
A large pinch of salt	4-5 tablespoonsful milk
2 oz. margarine	Milk to brush over.

Sieve flour, salt and baking powder, if used. Rub in margarine, and add mashed potatoes. Mix to a soft pliable dough with milk, and roll out ½-inch thick. Cut in two-inch rounds, put on a greased baking tin, brush the tops with milk, and quickly put in a hot oven, Mark 8 or 475 degrees F. on a shelf near the top of the oven. Time to bake, about 8-10 minutes. Split, butter and serve.

If preferred, the scones can be baked on a girdle or its substitute. In this case, roll the dough to ¼-inch thickness and do not brush with milk.

## JERSEY WONDERS

(St. Helier, Jersey)

½ lb. plain flour and 1 teaspoonful baking powder, or ½ lb. self-raising flour	2 oz. castor sugar
A pinch of salt	A pinch of grated nutmeg and of ground ginger
2 oz. margarine	2 eggs
	About 2 tablespoonsful milk.

Sieve the flour, salt, and baking powder if used. Rub in the margarine, add the sugar and spice, and mix to a dough with the whisked eggs, and a little milk if necessary. Roll out on a floured board to ¼-inch thickness.

Cut into rounds or oval shapes, make one slit in each oval and twist by pushing the left hand strip through the right hand slit.

Fry in deep fat or lard, which is just beginning to smoke, for about 7 minutes. If the Wonders float, turn as necessary to fry them to pale golden brown. Drain on crumpled paper, and dredge with castor sugar. Jersey Wonders can be eaten either hot or cold.

## OATEN BISCUITS WITH RUM BUTTER

(Cumberland)

6 oz. plain flour	6 oz. fine oatmeal
½ teaspoonful baking powder	3 oz. castor sugar
Pinch of salt	1 egg
3 oz. lard, margarine, or butter	About 1 tablespoonful milk

Sieve flour with baking powder and salt. Rub in fat, and add oatmeal and sugar. Mix to a stiff dough with beaten egg and milk. Roll out thinly and cut into rounds, using a plain cutter.

Put biscuits on greased baking tins, prick each in the middle, and bake in a moderately hot oven, Mark 5 or 400 degrees F. until pale golden brown, about 10 minutes. When cold, sandwich with Rum Butter.

Rum Butter—½ lb. fresh butter; ½ lb. soft, pale sugar (Barbados); ½ large nutmeg, grated; a wineglassful rum; a little castor sugar to dredge, and grated nutmeg.

Soften the butter, and if there are any lumps in the sugar roll it heavily with a rolling pin. Put sugar and grated nutmeg into a bowl and stir in the rum, mixing all well together. Lastly add the oiled butter, stirring slowly all the time until the mixture thickens. Put in a cold place to set.

Rum Butter is a very good sauce for puddings, instead of the more usual Hard Sauce. Pour it into a china bowl, see that it is smooth on top, and dredge lightly with castor sugar and a suspicion of freshly grated nutmeg to taste.

## YORKSHIRE TEA CAKES

1 lb. flour	½ pint milk and water
1 level teaspoonful salt	3-4 oz. currants and sultanas
1 oz. (scant) yeast	together
1 teaspoonful castor sugar	1 oz. chopped candied peel
3 tablespoonsful tepid water	A little butter and sugar for tops.
2 oz. lard	

Sieve the warmed flour into a warmed mixing basin, with the salt. Cream the yeast and sugar, and add 3 tablespoonsful of tepid water. Make a well in the middle of the flour, add the creamed yeast and water, and stir in a little of the flour to make a thin batter. Leave to rise for 20 minutes in a warm place.

Put the lard into a half-pint measure, and pour on boiling water as far as one-third of the measure, then fill up with cold milk. Work all to a dough, pouring the lard and milk into the middle of the batter. Add the prepared fruit, and after kneading, set the dough to rise for an hour.

Put the dough on to a floured board, cut into six or eight pieces, knead each to a ball, flatten and roll slightly with a floured rolling pin. Prick and put the cakes on a warmed greased baking tin. Leave to prove for 20-30 minutes.

Bake in a hot oven, Mark 7 or 450 degrees F., until firm and well browned. Split and butter, putting a little butter on top of each tea cake. Sprinkle with sugar. Pile the cakes one on the other, and cut down through the middle of the pile with a sharp knife.